Inside Look

McCALEB INITIATIVE FOR PEACE

FRIDAY, APRIL 2, 2004 | SUPPLEMENT TO THE CHART | SECTION B

Religion in India

The roots of coexistence

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page 2B: Introduction

Page 3B: Understanding Cultural Differences, Religious Pluralism

Page 4B: Passing Time

Page 5B: Exploring Kerala

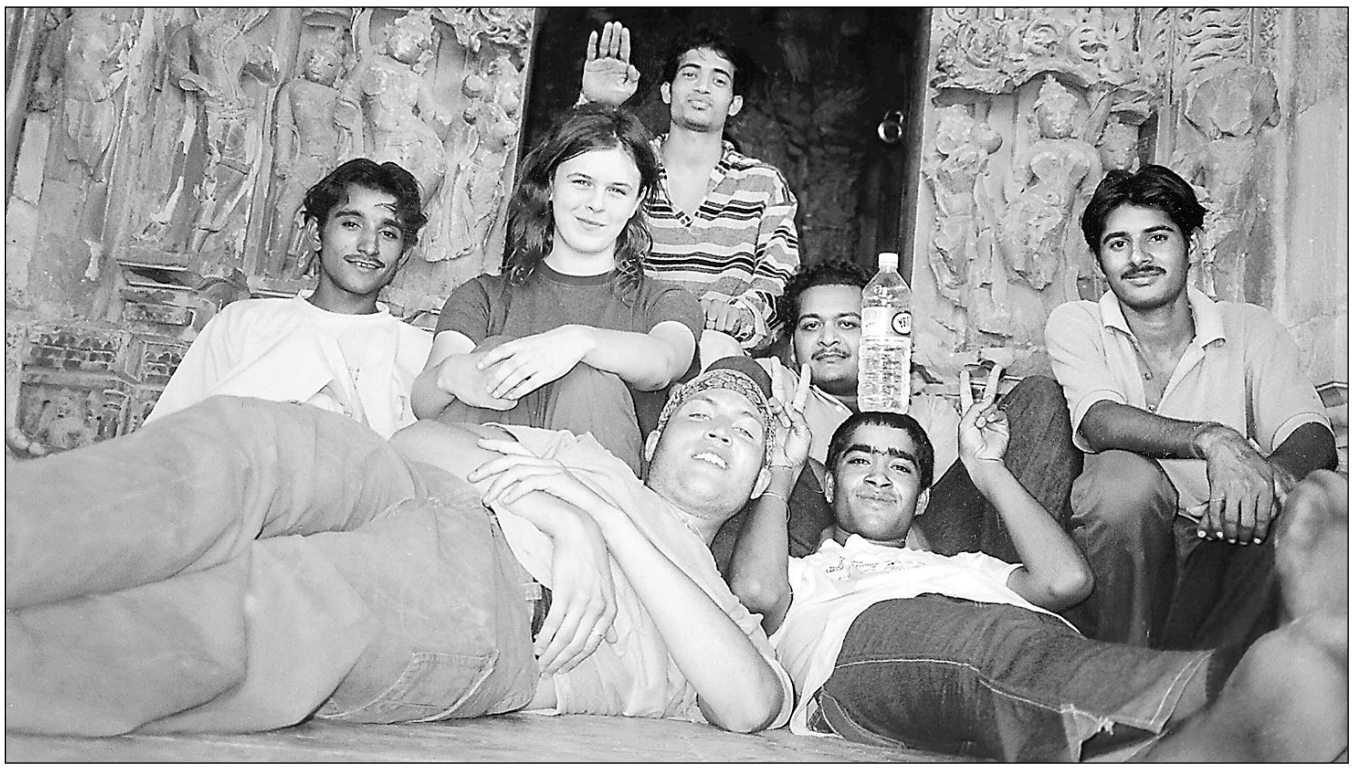
Page 6B: Islam

Page 7B: Hinduism

Page 8B: Seeing Through the Chaos

Page 9B: Henry Martyn Institute

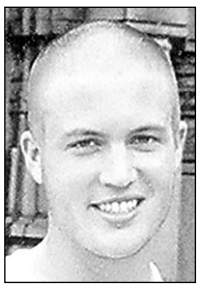
Page 12B: Spreading the Roots of Coexistence, What's in a Name?



Special to The Chart

Mac Kenney, junior French and sociology major, bottom left, Alice Ensor, junior communication and German major, second from left, sit with a group of young men in an abandoned temple.

Trip allows peace search



Mac Kenney
Chart Reporter

The late Kenneth McCaleb and his wife Margaret established the McCaleb Initiative for Peace in 1998. Both the McCalebs graduated from Joplin Junior College, the institution that would become Missouri Southern, and traveled extensively around the world. Kenneth served as a navigator in World War II and was shot down over Germany, where he spent the next 19 months in a prisoner of war camp. Kenneth returned to the United States with a hope to prevent the havoc war had played on his life from happening to new generations. Thus, he established the Peace Initiative to promote research on the broad topic of peace. Each year the Initiative awards teacher-student teams up to $5,000 for summer projects, "in search of peace."

In the spring of 2003, I was one of four McCaleb scholars. My mission revolved around the history of religion in India and its contemporary place in Indian society. How have so many religious traditions coexisted literally side-by-side? How do they understand each other? I was particularly intrigued by the ways in which Muslim/Hindu coexistence had taken shape over the Indian sub-continent's history. What are the histories of these faiths in India? Some of these questions brought me to India; others came to me while I was there.

Before departing I had taken classes and read books about Indian culture, history and religion, none of which prepared me for the stunning experience of India. Something funny happens when you learn — you discover more questions than answers. This can sometimes be frustrating, but also exhilarating. This experience both frustrated and exhilarated me this summer as I learned many things about India.

My search for peace had three phases: a tour of Northern India, a study program at the University of Hyderabad and a tour of Southern India.

I first arrived in New Delhi with Dr. Karl Schmidt, director of international programs at South Dakota State University, and fellow student Alice Ensor. Over the course of 14 days the three of us traveled across northern India, moving from village to village on a quest to visit unique historical sites. Soon, we met up with four other Southern students with whom I would spend the next seven weeks.

During the Southern-in-India study program, we explored Delhi, visited the magnificent Taj Mahal in Agra, spent six weeks at the University of Hyderabad and saw ancient Buddhist, Jain and Hindu caves carved deep into India's Western Ghats (a mountain range on the west coast).

During this time we were joined by Southern professors Dr. Bill Kumbier, faculty adviser to the Southern students, and later by Dr. Ree Wells, faculty adviser for my McCaleb Peace Initiative. Throughout, I tried to understand the roots of the long and largely peaceful coexistence between the diverse peoples of India.

Near the end of July, Wells, Kumbier and myself traveled to the beautiful state of Kerala in Southwest India. There we saw firsthand the foothold of Christianity in India and the oldest Jewish settlement in Cochin. The diverse and bustling city of Kolkata in Northwest India concluded my formal study of Indian culture. My visit to India ended on the scenic beaches of Goa.

These articles are meant to lead the reader through my experiences and understanding of India, religion and the roots of coexistence. The very number of different religious beliefs and ways of life that can be found in a single country, state or village is striking and testifies to the possibilities of religious coexistence.

Embracing religious pluralism: examining new ways to pray

On a March evening in 1981, I had the good fortune of hearing Naomi Shihab Nye read a selection of poems for "A Gathering of Poets" in the student union on the campus of Louisiana State University. As an undergraduate student, I was totally smitten with this exciting young poet whose work reflected her multi-cultural experiences: her father was a Muslim immigrant who spoke Arabic and prayed to Allah; her mother was Caucasian, and she grew up under the "light of Catholic miracles" in the Hispanic/Native American world of Southwest Texas. I delighted in each cross-cultural reference she provided that night and in her debut book, Different Ways to Pray. Over the years, her book's title has evolved into a mantra, a guiding principle in my life. I couldn't help but wonder, as Missouri Southern students were exposed to the piercing prose and poetry readings by Cuban authors and scholars during our Cuba Semester, if they were as moved by intriguing cultural images as I was listening to Nye over two decades ago.

Dr. Ree Wells
Associate Professor of Sociology

As a child, I grew up under the multi-ethnic, multi-racial cultural influences of south Louisiana, complete with Cajun and Creole cuisines, music and dancing. My father was United Methodist, while my mother was Southern Baptist, so I experienced a multi-denominational upbringing.

Further, as a young adult, I joined the Unitarian Universalist Church, an organization whose primary doctrine includes a respect for all world religions. Beyond religious tolerance, I learned the value of religious pluralism. It is in the U.U. spirit of embracing, not just tolerating, religious diversity that I enthusiastically accepted Mac Kenney's invitation to join him in a McCaleb Peace Initiative exploring the roots of religious coexistence in India.

Sociologists are interested in studying religion as a social institution. Rather than proclaiming judgments about the relative merits of one set of religious doctrines over another, we tend to analyze the social organizations of religion and the meanings that people attribute to their religious affiliations. Obviously, not all sociologists think alike when it comes to religion; we incorporate different theories to explain religious phenomena. According to the structural-functionalists, for instance, religion serves a variety of functions that promote social conformity in order to maintain the status quo. On the other hand, conflict theorists assert that religion serves primarily as an agent of social control; thus, it perpetuates social inequality. Further, Marxists assert that religion serves as an "opiate" for the masses. Feminists criticize the patriarchal practices of religions that exclude women from the most sacred positions in religious orders, as symbolic interactionists acknowledge the extent to which religion provides meaning and purpose in our lives — for women and men, rich or poor.

Turn to **Pluralism**, Page 10B

Mac Kenney/The Chart

An Indian native takes off his shoes before entering the arched door of the mosque. Hinduism is the dominant religion of the country.

Understanding crucial to global citizenship

By Mac Kenney
Chart Reporter

It is both difficult and important, no matter what society one comes from, to understand the cultures and religions of other peoples. To understand these things is to be civilized. As I saw more of Indian society, I learned how true this was.

During my first visit to a Muslim mosque, for example, I learned the hard way just how sensitive one must be to religion in India. Midday, we arrived at a large old mosque situated in a small village. The mosque was busy with *imams* (priests) and other Muslims going about their daily prayers. It was sometimes a little awkward when we were at a mosque. Mostly I felt this was because many of the men did not know why we were there and because we were intruding in a place of religious significance. After some time, I noticed an older man who had been following us with an air of suspicion. There was no malice in his gaze; he seemed only to want to understand what we were doing there. In an attempt to break the ice and show good will, I placed my hands together and said, *Namaste*, a respectful greeting almost anywhere in India - well, anywhere but at a mosque. The old man's eyes narrowed and he pointed to himself saying, *Mohs-lim, Mohs-lim.* He then lowered his eyes and said, *Salaam alaikum*, several times touching his hand to his forehead with each saying. I could tell I had said something wrong, but did not know what. The head *imam*, our guide at the mosque, came over and told me that *namaste* is Hindi, and should be spoken to Hindus; *salaam alaikum*, and its complementary hand gesture and lowering of the eyes, is Urdu, and is how one greets a Muslim. Needless to say, during the rest of my time at that mosque my hand hardly stopped going up to my forehead, and I could not lower my eyes and say *salaam alaikum* enough.

This was my first introduction to how broadly religion affects life for Indians, and just how practical cultural knowledge can be. We may not all find ourselves in a mosque somewhere in India, but with globalization and technology, we are all being exposed to and interacting with an increasing number of cultures that we may know little about. It is difficult to show someone respect, let alone be polite, if we do not understand his or her culture.

Turn to **Citizenship**, Page 11B

The universe is a web of interconnectivity in which all things influence all other things. Our works are an expression of this interconnectivity. Among this interconnectivity I would like to recognize some immediate influences of this project.

Above all, I would like to thank the McCalebs for creating The McCaleb Initiative for Peace. Also, Ellen Broglio provided us the opportunity to work with the Henry Martyn Institute. The time and input of Dr. Wells, Dr. Kumbier, Dr. Brown and Dr. Kluthe was invaluable to this project.

In Hyderabad, Dr. Prasad and Dr. Aloka Parasher-Sen provided creative outlets for the ideas found in these pages. Dr. Geraldine Forbes provided me with a wealth of ideas at a time when direction was badly needed. I would also like to thank my family and friends for their safe-haven of intellectual stimulus. Finally, thanks is due to Dr. Stebbins, the Institute of International Studies and *The Chart* for their hard work.

— Mac Kenney

Religions of India

Hinduism: Eighty-two percent of the population. Hinduism came to India around 1500 B.C.E. with the Aryan Migration. Important texts are Vedas and Upanishads. Modern Hinduism can be characterized as a vast collection of different practices and beliefs that have developed for more than 3,000 years across the Indian sub-continent. Relevant concepts include Dharma, Karma and reincarnation. Trimurti (which roughly means, "having three forms") refers to the most prominent deities of Hinduism: Brahman, Vishnu and Siva.

Islam: Twelve percent of the population. Islam came to India around the turn of the first millennium. The important text is the Quran. In India, Sufi saints have formed a unique blend of spirituality and tradition. The five pillars of Islam are: 1) Acknowledge Allah as the only God; 2) Pray five times a day in the direction of Mecca; 3) Practice charity; 4) Fast during the holy month of Ramadan; and 5) Make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime.

Sikhism: Two percent of the population. Sikhism was founded by Guru Nanak (1469-1538) in the Punjab area that is now split between India and Pakistan. Its important text is The Shri Guru Granth. A synthesis of Hinduism and Islam, Sikhs believe in a formless God that goes by many names (as in Islam), while also believing in reincarnation and karma (as in Hinduism). The goal of Sikhism is to build a close and loving relationship with God.

Christianity: Two percent of the population. First introduced to India by St. Thomas the Apostle in 52, large-scale conversions came with Portuguese in 1500s. Its important text is the Bible. Through compassion and charity, as exemplified by Christ, the work of God is done. Traditionally, the institutional church characterizes Catholicism, while a personal relationship and understanding of God defines much of the Protestant movement.

Buddhism: Less than 2 percent of the population. Buddhism was founded by the Buddha, "one who has awakened," Siddhartha Gautama, between 600 and 500 B.C.E. Its important text is the Tripitaka, a collection of teachings and ideas written about two and a half centuries after the Buddha's death. There are different sects of Buddhism. Generally the "middle way" is encouraged, which entails rejection of the two extremes: deprivation and hedonism.

Jainism: Less than 2 percent of the population. Jainism was founded by Mahavira, born between 600 and 500 B.C.E. Jainism has many ideas in common with Buddhism and Hinduism, such as reincarnation, karma and moksha (liberation). It has five Great Vows, which are non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity and non-possession/non-attachment. Jains claim their religion is older than Hinduism, and Mahavira is only the most recent tirthankara (great leader).

Zoroastrianism: Less than 2 percent of population. It is the ancient religion of Persia, of which many followers fled to India in the face of religious persecution. These Zoroastrians now living in India are called Parsis and reside mostly in and around the city of Mumbai. The Parsi population of India stands at about 60,000 and is dropping rapidly.

Mac Kenney/The Chart

About 40 Hindu temples remain in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh. Some are more than 1,000 years old.

Site houses temple history

Small village holds ancient traditions

BY MAC KENNEY
Chart Reporter

Khajuraho is a small village south of Delhi, but don't let its size fool you. There is such a long history of Hinduism in India, one that dates back to the second millennia B.C., that there is a curious supply of stupendous sites. Many are located virtually in the middle of nowhere.

My first experience with this was in Khajuraho, which is home to an amazing collection of about 40 temples built by the Chandela Rajput clan. The temples are more than 900 years old and while those that still stand are amazingly extravagant, they are merely the remnants of what was once a collection of 85 temples. The temples are not currently active, but in proximity to the main historical site is an active temple that evokes an interesting feeling of the passage of time and the perseverance of faith.

The active temple is similar in appearance to those frequented by tourists and historians and it makes one realize just how old Hinduism really is. Watching people climb the steps to worship on one side of a fence, and knowing that 1,000 years ago people were, in much the same manner and dress, walking up the steps on the other side of the fence, is a humbling experience.

During my first day in Khajuraho, fellow student Alice Ensor and myself met some young men who invited us to come to their home for lunch. They were gracious and after we had eaten lunch, they asked if Alice and myself wanted to hang out with them at their "usual spot." We replied that we certainly did and followed them out of the village and across some farms and open meadows. Finally we came to one of the old temples from the time of the Chandela Rajput clan.

While smaller, this temple was of the same design and layout as those we had spent the day visiting inside the fenced historical site. We asked them about the seeming abandonment of this temple. They said there was a local man, whom we later met, who made sure the animals stayed out, but other than that, the temple just sat there. I was amazed this ancient temple survived in these fields outside of town, unknown to most visitors. As we entered the inner sanctum of the temple Seepu one of our new friends jumped up to a ledge and comfortably stretched out; the ease with which he did this told me it was a regular relaxing spot.

As we sat and talked inside the cool retreat of this temple, they told us of the history of the Chandelas, from whom their families were mostly descended, and pointed out different stories and symbols portrayed by the many intricacies of the temple sculpture.

This experience taught me of the central place religion holds in the lives of many Indians. Hinduism is the prevalent religion of India, with approximately 82 percent of Indians identifying themselves as Hindu.

What statistics like this failed to teach me in the classroom was the splendor and magnificence a few millennia can afford a tradition, in this case Hinduism. Hinduism is woven into every aspect of life for most Indians, and given India's population of 1.2 billion, this is a significant number of people.

EXPLORING Kerala

State offers pristine scenery, plentiful seafood

Mac Kenney/The Chart

Tea shops are popular in India. This tea shop is outside of Munnar. People who walk in the mountains of Kerala can smell fresh tea, cardamom, cloves and countless other spices.

This was my third trip to India, but my first time in the strikingly beautiful state of Kerala, traversing the southwestern portion of the country along the Arabian Sea.

Kerala's palm tree-lined coastal backwaters and luscious tea-growing *ghat*, or hill, regions were unlike any other places in India I had previously visited.

Dr. N. Ree Wells
Associate Professor of Sociology

I participated in the Southern-in-India Program in the summer of 2000, based at the University of Hyderabad; during this study abroad, six Missouri Southern faculty and 12 students visited dozens of Hindu temples (large and small, dedicated to various gods and goddesses), Muslim mosques and the phenomenal jewel-inlaid marble monument, the Taj Mahal in Agra. During the summer of 2002, in conjunction with my sabbatical, I returned to collect data for Project South Asia (with Dr. Karl Schmidt), visiting among other religious sites, a Sikh temple in New Delhi, the birthplace of Hindu Lord Krishna in Mathura and ancient Buddhist *stupas* in Sanchi. Thus, previous experiences exposed me to some of India's rich, sacred heritages and current religious expressions.

In conjunction with Southern's "India Semester" in fall 2002, I taught an inter-disciplinary course, Contemporary India: Dharma, Development and Diversity. Mac Kenney enrolled in that special topics course and, subsequently, invited me to participate with him in the McCaleb Peace Initiative. Kenney proposed a study abroad designed to gather information about the origins and maintenance of centuries of religious coexistence in India. During the course of that study, I was able to fulfill a dream of visiting Kerala.

A National Geographic wonderland, this emerald strip of land contains sandy beaches and forested highlands. A Hindu legend claims Parasuraman, the sixth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, once stood high on a *ghat* and threw his axe into the sea, commanding the sea to retreat. As it did, the picturesque land emerging from the parted water became Kerala. Some of the most romantic waterfalls and lakes in the world are located in Kerala, along with spectacular wildlife sanctuaries.

The calm and serene backwaters play an important historic role in the spice trade and a crucial contemporary role in the state's economy, carrying coconuts, rubber and rice, as well as tea and spices, to trading centers along the coast. Three-hour backwater lagoon tours in small, wooden boats, propelled by their owners pushing a long pole, contribute to the local economy; Kenney and I enjoyed such a peaceful cruise along a coconut grove.

A social and political showcase for India, the state of Kerala has a well-developed infrastructure and boasts the highest literacy rates, the lowest fertility rates and the best standard of living in the country. This array of educational, health care and occupational opportunities - for both men and women - is virtually unknown to most Indians outside of Kerala. Kerala's track record of increased human capabilities and greater gender equality is particularly intriguing.

Certainly there is absolute poverty in Kerala, but we observed more people there than in other regions of India who were healthy - both physically and emotionally - because of the greater availability of resources necessary for people to thrive, as well as to survive. Consequently, we noticed more people smiling as they conducted the daily tasks of their lives. Another striking difference we noted while traveling throughout Kerala was the relative absence of emaciated people on the streets, and there were fewer beggars confronting us.

Food, especially seafood, was more plentiful, given Kerala's coastal and inland waters. Fishermen along the Malabar Coast use Chinese fishing nets to this day, another testament to Kerala's international influences. We were invited onto a bamboo fishing platform in Cochin, where five fishermen let us test our hands at pulling in their large nets. We caught an eel and a small array of local fish, divided by size and type among various plastic containers. The silhouettes of these Chinese fishing nets are striking against the backdrop of a Keralan sunset.

Over the centuries, Kerala's rich, alluvial soil has nurtured major plantations that produce some of the world's most coveted teas, as well as cardamom, black pepper, cinnamon and ginger in abundance. Early Arab and Jewish traders exported Kerala's spices to the West; these contacts in turn led to the arrival of Islam, Judaism and Christianity in the region. Kerala was the first place in India to host notable populations of these three faiths.

As Christianity, Islam and Judaism found their way into Kerala, a tolerant people welcomed them; an essential feature of Kerala's heritage is communal harmony and religious tolerance. Since Kenney is exploring the historical emergence and contemporary significance of Christianity, Islam and Hinduism in other articles, I'd like to explore the religious tradition of Judaism in Kerala further.

We selected Cochin, a thriving city situated on the Malabar Coast of the Arabian Sea, as our home base.

One of our religious destinations was a Jewish synagogue reached by a ferryboat ride to the island of Fort Cochin across the bay. According to the guidebook, "Kerala and Her Jews," the first Palestinian Jews arrived in the region more than 2,000 years ago, before the Christian era.

If, as many believe, Jesus' disciple Thomas traveled to India and eventually reached Cochin, it would have been this Jewish community who welcomed him.

Although the history of Jews of Kerala is sometimes obscure, Hindu rulers granted the equivalent of modern-day tax breaks to the Jews' independent principality. As a result of the generosity shown to Jews by successive

Hindu leaders, India earned the reputation as a land of religious tolerance.

Further, the fame of this Jewish enclave spread far, attracting thousands of Jews from Spain and other European countries over the centuries.

The current settlement, actually known as "Jew Town," was established in 1567, and a synagogue was built there in 1568. While the history of Jews in India was not always marked by acceptance and integration, generally the Jews were not persecuted.

The Portuguese occupation, following Vasco da Gama's discovery of the sea route to Kerala's spice country, however, proved a time of torture for the Jews along the Malabar Coast. This "darkest period" continued until the late 1600s, when the Dutch appeared in Cochin and Jews were again allowed to prosper.

Turn to **KERALA**, Page 11B

Islam plants seeds of new coexistence

BY MAC KENNEY
Chart Reporter

Mac Kenney/The Chart

Jama Masjid is the largest mosque in India. Islam was brought to India by Sufis as early as the eighth century.

Islam came to India after Hinduism and radically transformed the religious landscape.

At first, Islam arrived as a trickle of ideas that came with a few mystical and powerful men known as Sufis. Later, invaders and empire builders followed these spiritual men.

As early as the eighth century, the Arab conquest of Sind (modern-day south Pakistan) was complete. After a time of sporadic invasions, the Delhi Sultanate was established in 1192. The Sultanate, which lasted until the 16th century, marks a time of transition to Islam for many lower-caste Hindus, and a time of coexistence between Muslim rulers and their mostly Hindu constituency. Ainslie Embree suggested that as "they (cultures and religions) coexisted for more than 600 years when the rulers were Muslims says much about the nature of Islam in India, as well as of Hinduism."

With the disintegration of the Delhi Sultanate by 1525, the first of what would become a unifying lineage of Mogul rulers assumed power in Delhi. The most important and without a doubt the most popular of the Moguls was Akbar. His reign from 1556-1605 saw the unification of the northern Indian sub-continent and was notable for its receptivity to other religious traditions. Akbar's three wives were Hindu, Muslim and Christian. The designs that decorate Akbar's tomb synthesize Islamic, Hindu and Christian symbology; indeed, a careful effort was made to give each the same surface area. The same gestures toward religious tolerance and synthesis can be seen throughout Fathepur Sikri, Akbar's now "ghost town" capital, testifying to his attempt to create a single, unified Indian religion.

Akbar was relentless in his pursuit to unify the religions of India. He identified himself with the land and people over which he ruled and wanted to create a religious tradition that synthesized all those under his rule. He tried, unsuccessfully, to create this religion by inviting followers of Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Jainism to Fathepur Sikri.

Like Hinduism, the past and present of Islam in India constitute a vast collection of diverse practices. The Turks who controlled north India at times established the Sunni tradition, the majority of the world's Islamic traditions. In addition, rulers with Iranian connections patronized Shia scholars, a minority, but significant Islamic tradition.

"The result was that all the many divergent schools of Islam flourished in India," Embree said.

As said before, there is also a long tradition of Sufis in India, whose introspective spirituality has generally placed them outside institutionalized religion.

There are many stories in Islam. The most important story is of the Prophet Muhammad. Here, the focus is on those stories that come from India and create the religious meanings of Islam in India. The Muslim patron saint of Mumbai is, for instance, Maxdum Faqi Ali Paru.

Dr. Hugh Van Skyhawk related Maxdum's story as follows:

Maxdum was a religious-minded boy and a devoted son to his pious mother. One evening, as Maxdum's mother was about to fall asleep, she asked her son to fetch a glass of water. When Maxdum returned, he found his mother had fallen asleep. Thinking that his mother might awaken and suffer thirst, he stood silently at her bedside holding the glass of water in his hand until morning. When his mother woke up and realized what had happened, she wept and prayed to Allah to bless her son. From that time on, Maxdum, who was about 10 years old, had a strong desire for spiritual knowledge. Then one night in his dreams, he beheld Xwaja Xizr standing on a rock in the ocean. Xizr bade Maxdum to come to him in the ocean after his dawn prayers. He did so and Xwaja Xizr began teaching him the inner meanings of the Holy Quran, (these inner meanings were considered secret teachings that Maxdum could not tell others about). After some days, Maxdum's mother noticed her son's repeated absence in the early morning and asked him where he went. Remembering Xwaja Xizr's stipulation, he hesitated at first, but finally revealed his secret to her. On the following morning, Maxdum did not find Xwaja Xizr and returned home weeping. When his mother asked the reason for this, Maxdum told her about Xwaja Xizr's stipulation. With tears filling her eyes, she prayed to Allah to forgive her son. The next morning Maxdum found Xwaja Xizr again waiting for him on a rock in the ocean. The Green Prophet (Xwaja Xizr) then told Maxdum that Allah had answered his mother's prayers and began teaching him again.

Through stories like this, Indian Muslims learn the values and meanings of Islam. Across India there are *darghas* (tombs of Sufi saints and Muslim holy men) where people pray and leave offerings.

Sufi Saints, Muslim holy men whose intense spirituality places them outside institutional religion, have played a major role in the development of Islam in India and in shaping contemporary Islam in India. One cannot visit Hyderabad without noticing the abundant images of a contemporary living deity: Shirdi Sai Baba. Sai Baba was a Sufi who lived until 1918. Around this man a powerful narrative has taken shape. With his name, we can immediately see the inter-faith meaning that characterizes many Sufi Saints. "Sai" is the Urdu (the language spoken by most Muslims in India) word for saint, while "Baba" is the Hindi word for father. Images of Sai Baba are everywhere in Hyderabad, notably in the icons of home shrines and on taxi driver's dashboards. There is also a Sai Baba shrine at the Birla Temple, a central place of Hindu worship. Sai Baba is popular with people of all religious backgrounds. His stories set examples of religious acceptance and understanding that play an important role in fostering religious coexistence.

The daily practice of Islam consists mostly in prayer and behavioral guidelines. The five pillars of Islam are:

1. Acknowledge Allah as the only God
2. Pray five times a day in the direction of Mecca
3. Practice charity
4. Fast during the Holy month of Ramadan
5. Make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime.

Like Hinduism, Islam places certain restrictions on its followers: Muslims are forbidden to eat pork. Alcohol is also taboo in Islam, as it prohibits reason and diminishes intelligence, logical prowess and spiritual sensitivity.

Islam is a part of India's rich religious past and plays an important role in contemporary India. Akbar set important precedents in both India and Islam for the possibilities of religious coexistence. The invaders and empire builders that brought Islam to India did not set lasting precedents of religious intolerance (although some did try). Rather, the precedents that have lasted are those of inter-religious understanding and goodwill.

'Indo-European' religion encapsulates many tribal traditions

By Mac Kenney
Chart Reporter

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world. Hinduism began around 1500 B.C., around the time of the Aryan Migration.

During the migration, the peoples who had formerly inhabited the fertile lands between the Caspian and Aral Seas left the land and spread out to the east, west and south. The Aryans are often referred to as "Indo-European," for those who migrated west are the ancestors of many Europeans, and those who migrated south are the ancestors of many Indians. The religious traditions they brought with them laid the foundations for Hinduism.

In the beginning (at least the beginning of recorded south-Asian history), the Aryan religion of the Vedas was directed by Brahmin priests.

Brahmins are the uppermost level in a system of social stratification outlined by the Vedas; this system is now known as the caste system.

Brahmins occupy the top level, followed by Kshatriyas (nobles and warriors), Vaishyas (merchants and business people) and Sudras (servants and peasants). There is even a caste so low it is not considered a caste at all — the Dalits, or "untouchables."

Though officially unconstitutional, the caste system still plays a big role in Indian society, and its complete abolition is the focus of a major political movement led by Dalits.

Hinduism is not a single faith but a collection of similar practices and histories. The Hinduism one sees in India today invokes deities such as Hanuman (the monkey god), Lakshmi (goddess of prosperity) and Ganesh (symbol of good luck and the remover of obstacles). These deities give meaning to everyday life and provide a focus for faith and devotion. Although there are many different deities, some specific to only a few villages, the divine trinity of Brahman, Vishnu and Siva, also known as the Trimurthi, is universal. These three deities represent creation, preservation and destruction, respectively, and have played an important role, both historically and in the contemporary religious lives of Indians.

Hinduism today can best be understood from two vantage points: stories and practice.

Mac Kenney/The Chart

Hindu temples have no formal services. However, some temples carry out certain rites daily or weekly.

The stories of Hinduism are recorded in the epic poems, the "Ramayana" and the "Mahabarata." Though many Hindus may not have read either, the stories of these epics are everywhere in India — in films, children's stories and in public murals in every Indian city. In the late 1980s, Doordarshan, India's national television station, ran a serial version of the "Ramayana." The show was hugely popular; India virtually stopped every Sunday morning as people were glued to their televisions. Murals in temples show the story of Rama, "Ramayana" means, roughly, "Rama's way," and there are children's comic books telling the stories of Rama, Hanuman, Krishna and a collection of Indian mythological figures.

The practice of Hinduism is different from congregational-based religions like Christianity. Daily *puja*, or worship, begins at the shrines in every Hindu home. These shrines may be no larger than the kitchen corner, for a poor family, or may occupy an entire room in the home of upper-class Indians. The basic elements of a shrine include an image or symbol of a Hindu god or goddess — most often Siva or Vishnu — some incense and a place (such as a plate or bowl) to offer food or flower petals to the deity. Pictures of Jesus, Muhammad, the Buddha or anyone else who has been important in the person's life may also be found at a shrine. Indian shops are stocked with statues, incense and other ingredients for home shrines.

Even public worship is highly individual. There are no services at Hindu temples: mostly worshippers come and go on their own, carrying out their daily duties. However, in many temples certain rites are carried out on a daily or weekly basis.

Dr. Ree Wells and I were able to see in one ceremony at a temple in Kerala a procession of devotees who circled the inner chamber of the temple beating drums and chanting; they then entered the inner-chamber and left an offering to the mother-goddess shrine inside. As in the home, each public shrine is devoted to an individual god or goddess. At the shrine, people offer food, pray or chant and generally leave a donation for the temple.

Hinduism places many constraints on its believers. High-caste Hindus are prohibited from consuming meat and may only eat food prepared by a member of their own caste (or higher). Marriage is almost always within one's own caste.

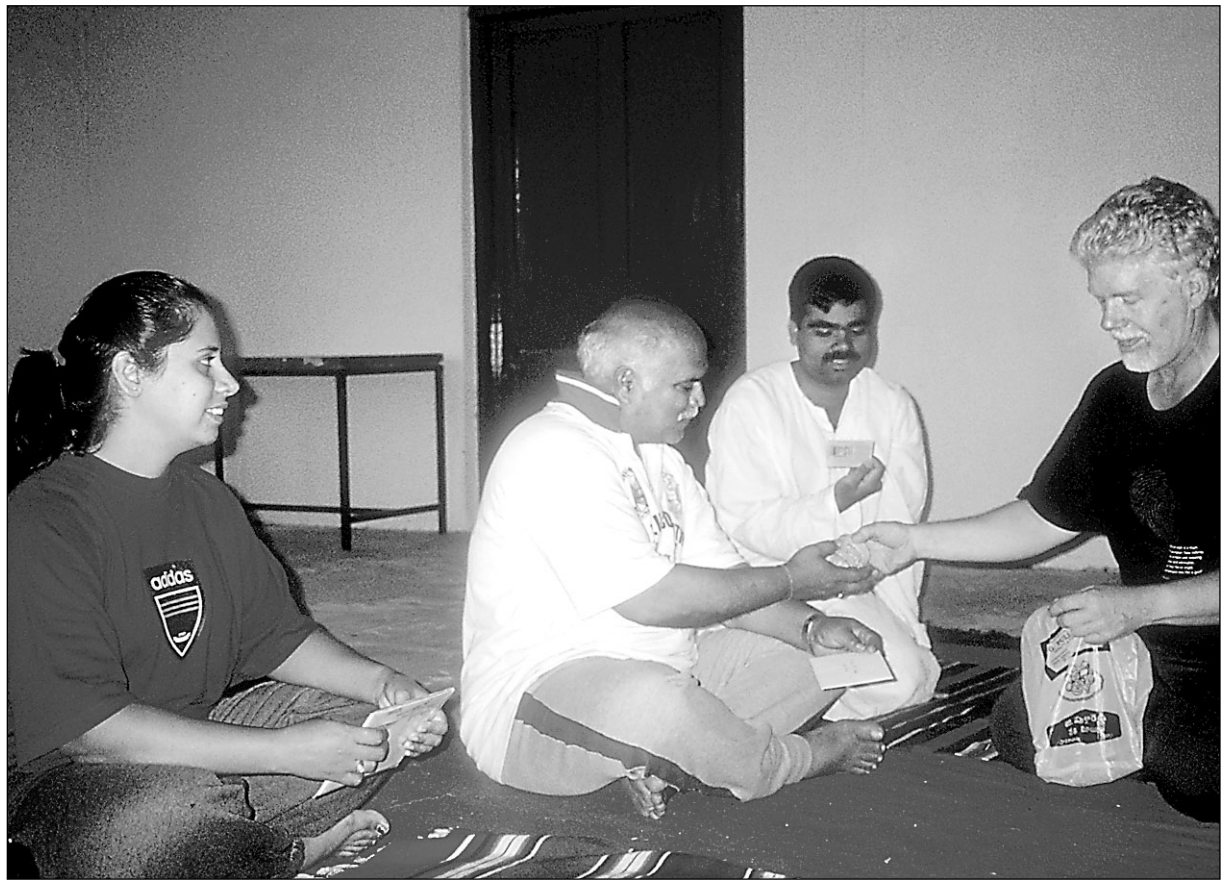
Hindus do not believe in an afterlife on the Christian model, though they believe in reincarnation, an infinite cycle of death and rebirth. A moral life will result in a person's rebirth to a higher level of consciousness.

The ultimate goal is not heaven, but enlightenment through knowledge.

The overwhelming characteristic of Hinduism is its diversity and evolution.

During the last 3,000 years, the religion has developed rich philosophies, intoxicating tales, a plethora of gods, and, recently, a virulent nationalism that threatens the future of the world's largest democracy.

Americans form wrong idea of India



Mac Kenney/The Chart

Dr. William Kumbier (far right), professor of English, bids farewell to yoga instructors.

Dr. William Kumbier
Professor of English

It is easy for any American who looks to find evidence of religious conflict in India.

Even though roughly 80 percent of the population is Hindu, in a country of more than 1 billion people, the roughly 14 percent over 140 million who are Muslim constitute a population equal to or greater than the entire population of India's Muslim neighbor and nemesis, Pakistan. It is therefore not surprising that many Hindus, including Hindu nationalists and political and religious proponents of Hindutva, or "Hindu-ness," regard the Muslims of India as formidable threats to the beliefs and ways of life they hold sacred. And, accordingly, it is also not surprising that the "breaking news" from India most Americans receive — of the startling small amount of news from India that we do receive — should focus on tension and violence between members of the country's two most practiced faiths.

Indeed, while preparing my thoughts for this perspective, I was skimming the Sunday *New York Times* of Oct. 11, 2003, and almost immediately fell upon a story headlined, "Indian police arrest Hindus seeking temple." This report is merely the most recent in scores of *Times* articles, not to mention thousands of articles that have riddled the Indian press, devoted to the controversy over Ayodhya, a pilgrimage town in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state. For more than 300 years, Ayodhya was the site of a Muslim mosque, the Babri Masjid, built by the Mogul ruler Babur in the 16th century. Then, in December 1992, during a massive Hindu rally, the mosque was torn down by a mob, partly acting on the conviction that the mosque had been built on top of a much older Hindu temple that marked the birthplace of Rama, a widely worshiped and revered incarnation of the pre-eminent Hindu god Vishnu, sustainer of creation. When the mosque was destroyed, nationwide riots ensued, killing thousands.

Since that time, and especially since the Hindu nationalist-oriented Bharatiya Janata Party has come to power, Hindus have agitated for the reconstruction in Ayodhya of the Rama temple, and that agitation, too, has generated more violence. More recently in February 2002, a train coach carrying Hindus returning to Gujarat from a pilgrimage to Ayodhya was attacked and burned by Muslims, killing 58 people; retaliatory violence and counter violence by Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat led to the deaths of hundreds more. Now, in this most recent development, Indian police have detained, as a preventive measure, more than 600 Hindus who arrived in Ayodhya to renew and intensify the campaign for the Rama temple. *The Times* article reported that "nearly 1,500 heavily-armed policemen are now guarding the site while 3,000 paramilitary personnel have fanned out in other parts of Ayodhya," and "about 2,000 more troops were expected to arrive soon." Stay tuned.

In trying to absorb and make sense of stories like this, along with the continual reports of sparring between India and Pakistan over the disputed region of Kashmir (another conflict with Hindu-Muslim tension at its base) Americans understandably form a picture of India as a country torn by passionate religious beliefs and what usually accompanies them: religious intolerance and violence.

Yet, while no one can ignore the horror and tragic human consequences of the violence in India that can be traced to religious differences, one would also be wrong to neglect a compelling and continuing fact of Indian life: most of the time, Hindus and Muslims coexist peacefully, along with Sikhs, Jains, Christians, Jews, Buddhists and other believers.

In fact, one cannot live for even a day in India without striking reminders, not only that the country is diverse, but that usually the diversity works. Both in the city of Hyderabad, traditionally Muslim but with a huge Hindu population, where Mac Kenney, Dr. Ree Wells and I were based, and in other locations we visited as well, Hindus, Muslims and others are practicing daily the skills of living together, deliberately or not. In the marketplaces and bazaars, gestures, expressions and glances find and respond to each other, sometimes overtly, sometimes subconsciously, in Hindi, Urdu, Telugu, English and in silence.

In the English department of the University of Hyderabad, I taught and worked fruitfully with Muslim, Hindu and Parsi colleagues. In our daily practice of yoga, an activity deeply grounded in Hindu philosophy, two of our teachers were Hindu, the third, and most adept, was Muslim.

To cite one further dramatic example: the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad, dedicated to promoting reconciliation and religious tolerance, supports a community center near the old Muslim center of Charminar. The center is situated in a slum, at what has occasionally been the flash point of Hindu-Muslim tensions. To one side of the center is a Hindu neighborhood; to the opposite side is a Muslim neighborhood and to a third side, a community of "untouchables," or outcastes now called "Dalits."

Children and teenagers from each of these communities go to school at the center and participate in after-school programs. When we visited, Hindu and Muslim teenage girls were sitting at low tables, closely together, learning to make dress patterns, while upstairs, younger children were having an English and social studies lesson on the topic of homes and why we need them. The center's guiding theory is people who have worked, studied and played side by side will be less inclined to fight each other.

One of the "hot" stories related to Ayodhya this last summer was a federal court had ordered yet more archaeological research at the contested site, to attempt, once again, to determine if there is any physical evidence supporting the claim that the site once housed a Hindu temple. Many digs have already taken place at Ayodhya and many more will, and the findings always have been and will continue to be contested.

I would suggest ultimately what such archaeological research will confirm, though, is a truth many Indians and friends of India already know: for centuries the lives and faiths, the physical and the spiritual constructions, of Hindus, Muslims and others have interlaced so much that they are to a profound degree indivisible from each other, and the India that flowers today has coexistence at its root.

Institute attempts to unite many faiths

Mac Kenney/The Chart

Dr. William Kumbier, professor of English, Dr. Ree Wells, associate professor of sociology, and guide Raja Rajeswari (right center) visited workers at the Shankernager Peace Through Empowerment Center, where Hindu and Muslim women work together.

By Mac Kenney
Chart Reporter

The Henry Martyn Institute was founded by a group of Christian missionaries in 1930 in Lahore, Pakistan.

Originally the aim of the Institute was to gain an understanding of Islam so the group could more easily complete its mission of conversion. Slowly, though, as the Catholic Church shifted toward opening up religious dialogues and away from evangelism, so did the HMI. By 1970, the Institute had settled in its current day home of Hyderabad.

Dr. Ree Wells and I, along with Dr. William Kumbier, had the pleasure of talking with the director and associate director of the HMI, Andreas and Diane D'Souza. The D'Souzas told us the HMI's general aim is "reconciliation between people of different faiths and cultures." To achieve this end, they support several ongoing programs of both community involvement and opportunities for academic study, to foster and encourage "the study of religions and practical grassroots involvement with the objective of improving relationships between divided groups and communities."

A conflict resolution program is one ongoing effort by the HMI. This program involves establishing networks of skilled peace facilitators in Hyderabad and across India, so when problems arise, there are people in the immediate vicinity and community who have been trained in leadership and conflict resolution. To this end, the HMI works with local organizations interested in furthering peaceful resolutions. The Institute sponsors an annual workshop that aims at attracting people, both nationally and internationally, and many more workshops throughout the year for regional groups.

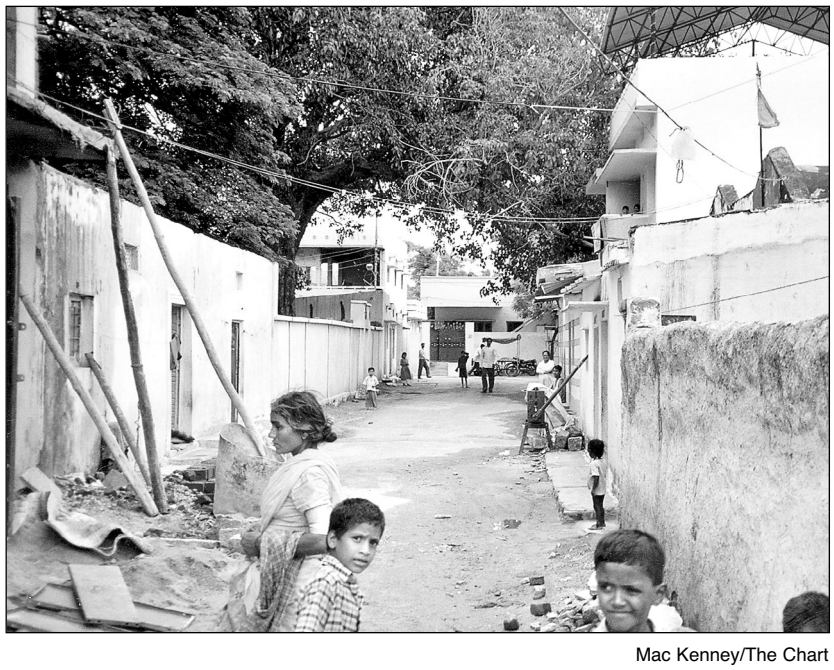
The peace through empowerment program is another of HMI's ongoing efforts. Helping women from violence-prone areas of Hyderabad build job-related skills is a way to generate income and to provide a place Hindus and Muslims can frequently work together, enabling both groups to develop a better understanding of each other. A nondescript building with a small sign houses the Peace Through Empowerment Center in the poor neighborhood of Shankernager. The HMI chose this locality for the center because it is a violence-prone area where both Hindus and Muslims live.

The center is a place where Hindu and Muslim women work and learn side by side. At this center, women learn how to tailor clothes, read and write both Hindi and Urdu and help themselves and their center become self-sufficient. At the center, there is a careful effort to keep an equal ratio of Muslim and Hindu women and to create an environment conducive to working and learning together. On the walls are examples of different pieces of common Indian dress, such as the *salwar kameez, kurtas* and *saris*.

HMI project officer Raja Rajeswari explained the sewing machines the women used were either from the community, or HMI had lent money to the center so they could buy machines and pay HMI back once they were making clothes. Paying for the machines in this manner plays an important role in the women feeling pride in their work.

Turn to **INSTITUTE** Page 11B

Neighborhood center brings peace to riot-plagued area



Mac Kenney/The Chart

Outside the Sultan Shahi Community Center, the streets are busy with people working and children playing. Riots are common and blood has often been shed on this street in times of religious tension.

By Mac Kenney
Chart Reporter

Perhaps the most impressive community development center the Henry Martyn Institute runs can be found in the Sultan Shahi neighborhood.

Sultan Shahi is a riot-prone area of Hyderabad, where tensions between the Muslim and Hindu residents are often high. Raja Rajeswari, our guide and project officer for HMI, explained the group chose the specific location of the center within the neighborhood because it is situated on the street that divides the Muslim area from the Hindu area. Blood has been shed there. The HMI has developed programs to begin a dialogue among those in the community.

On the first level of the center, young women are learning how to do *henna*, a popular decoration for the hands, which they will one day do to earn income. They practice from pictures in books and designs from their own imaginations. They make beautiful greeting cards to sell to people in the community and the occasional group of westerners.

After having seen some of the strict divisions between people on the street, it is rare to see Muslim women mingling with Hindu women at the market, it was amazing to see young women in *burkas* (the black garb of many Muslim women) sitting with young Hindu women, all giggling and chatting about the funny-looking Americans who just walked in the door. Women who would normally never have met become friends within the safe confines of the development center.

There have been obstacles, but the people at HMI have been both aggressive and innovative in overcoming difficult situations.

Raja explained that originally they had simply gathered the women together and hoped they would interact with each other. What happened was quite the contrary; they immediately split into groups along religious lines and kept to their own groups rarely reaching out to the others. The director's solution was to turn the center into a training facility where the women would learn skills and, inadvertently, interact as they worked together. This turned out to be the perfect solution.

It also created a reason for being there that was easier for the women's husbands to accept.

Turn to **CENTER** Page 11B

Student uncovers Christianity in India

Mac Kenney/The Chart

Andhra Pradesh is home of this colorful Catholic church. In this Church a mixture of Hindu and Catholic traditions can be seen. Inside, a statue of Jesus in an open lotus flower can be seen. The open flower represents immortality. Christianity first came to India with Thomas the Apostle.

BY MAC KENNEY
Chart Reporter

Christianity in India has a much longer and richer history than I had ever thought.

In preparation for this research trip I was, of course, aware that 2 percent of Indians were Christian. What this statistic masks, however, is the concentration of this population in certain areas of the south is almost overwhelming. Arriving in Cochin, for instance, one of the first things taxi riders from the airport see is a large Catholic church and shrine to the Virgin Mary. This old church, though beautiful, does not prepare the visitor for the prevalence of Christianity in Kerala. Driving further into the downtown, it becomes obvious Christianity sets much of Kerala apart from the rest of India.

The history of Christianity in India is long and varied. It is a history that owes much to 16th century Portuguese explorers but also has an interesting connection to a much older time.

Thomas the Apostle, the "doubting Thomas" of the Christian New Testament, is believed by local legend, and by many historians, to have landed in what is now Kerala in 52 C.E. He is said to have established the Syrian Christian church that is still active in southern India and then made his way across southern India until his death near modern-day Chennai. There is a shrine dedicated to the Apostle's landing place north of Cochin and a magnificent church where he is supposed to have died near Chennai.

Thus, there is Christianity in India that antedates the Roman Catholicism, and, indeed by all forms of Western Christianity. This suggests possibilities for Christianity that may be new or unfamiliar to us.

The culture of southern India's Christianity is in some ways similar to that of Hinduism. The two faiths have adopted and blended traits from each other as they developed side by side. For example, in the Andhra Pradesh town of Nagarjunasagar there is a Catholic church that bears many similarities to Hindu temples. It is brightly and extravagantly colored with pillars and intricate designs. Flanking the entrance to the church are two statues, one of Mary and the baby Jesus, the other of St. Paul. The inside of the church is brightly colored with blues, reds, yellows and everything in between leaping off the walls. One can find a large crucifix bordered by blue neon lights. In fact, there may be more neon lights in that church than in all of Joplin.

Next to the church is a Hail Mary shrine, complete with a trough so devotees can wash their feet before entering. This custom of washing the feet is seen most often in Hinduism. It is a good example of the traits common to Hinduism and Christianity in India. Churches like this one (although none quite as extravagant) can be found elsewhere in India: they never cease to amaze.

Since the introduction of Christianity, there have been many converts from Hinduism for reasons similar to those that lead Hindus to convert to Islam. On the streets of Kolkata, one sees signs saying simply "Jesus Loves You," and in these signs is perhaps the key to understanding why Christianity is attractive to so many Indians.

India is a country of 1.2 billion people. The dominant religion has not always fostered social equality among members of different castes. For many, the prospect of a god who knows your name, cares about you and sacrificed his only son for you is an attractive idea.

By the time I had left India, I had seen pontifical shrines hidden deep in palm tree forests and magnificent cathedrals from the earliest days of Portuguese trading and been allowed the pleasure of conversing with peace activists heading a Christian organization, founded by Christians, working toward religious understanding.

This long history of Christianity and its careful balance against India's other faiths shows another aspect of religious coexistence.

PLURALISM:

From Page 3B

According to the classical sociologist, Emile Durkheim, religion encompasses a set of beliefs and practices related to the sacred, or that is extraordinary, and inspires a sense of awe or reverence. This contrasts sharply with the profane, or the ordinary world of everyday life, such as going to class or surfing the net.

It is illuminating to inquire about the symbolic boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Obviously, worshippers pass through physical structures, such as gates and arched doorways, to enter sacred spaces. At such moments, Muslims and Hindus, for example, remove their shoes before entering a mosque or temple in order to avoid defiling their sacred spaces with soles that have touched the profane ground outside. With regard to religious practices, the devout engage in various formal rituals or ceremonial behaviors in order to gain access to the sacred, such as daily prayers or *puja* at small altars in the homes of most Hindus or the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca for Muslims.

Although religion is a cultural universal, there is considerable cultural variation in the expression of religious beliefs and practices. For example, some religions are monotheistic, like Christianity and Islam, while others are polytheistic, like Hinduism. Yet, the distinction between monotheism and polytheism is blurred to the extent that all three religions envision the universe as grounded in a single, unifying essence or being, albeit with numerous incarnations or manifestations. Further, all religions share a conception of a moral force or purpose that transcends the individual and offers us a way to relate to the supernatural.

Every university-educated person should know some basic facts about the major world religions, such as may be found in any introductory sociology or comparative religion textbook. Christianity is the most widespread religion, with nearly two billion followers, representing one-third of the world's people. Islam, whose followers are called Muslims, is the next largest world religion, representing one-fifth of humanity, with approximately 1.2 billon followers. Although chords of fear are struck as we hear the threats of extreme Islamic fundamentalists, most Muslims (like most Christians) do not espouse fundamentalism or an ultra-conservative religious doctrine. Hinduism has the distinction of being the oldest world religion, dating back 4,500 years, and has 800 million adherents, most of whom reside in India. Although Buddhism originated in India, and claims 350 million followers worldwide, it is a minority religion there today. Judaism is a relatively small world religion with about 15 million followers, and the largest concentration of Jews resides in the United States.

Western religions, including Christianity, Islam and Judaism, typically are monotheistic and tend to be congregational, with people worshiping in groups at specific times and places. For example, reverential Muslims gather together at a mosque for ritual prayer five times a day. Eastern religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, tend to highlight both individual spiritual development and ethical codes for living; further, they are informally fused with their cultures. Mac and I witnessed hundreds of Hindus at various temples across India who came and went as they pleased, paying little attention to other worshippers (except for a curious eye toward us).

Although most of the approximately 285 million people in the United States. have a Christian religious affiliation (56.2 percent are Protestant and an additional 25.1 percent are Catholic), our country is founded upon religious freedom and characterized by religious diversity. Currently, there are over seven million Muslims in the United States; that's more than many established Christian denominations, including Episcopalians, Presbyterians or Unitarians.

Although Hinduism is intertwined with Indian culture, it is also a part of our cultural diversity, with 1.4 million Hindus living in the United States.

In addition, select elements of Hinduism have diffused into our culture: Who hasn't heard of dharma, the universal force that presents everyone with moral responsibilities, or karma, a system of spiritual rewards and punishments based on worldly actions, or reincarnation, the spiritual progression of human souls?

What concluding remarks do I have about religious pluralism? First, both the United States and India do not have an official religion; instead, the church (or synagogue or mosque or temple) is independent of the state.

In both countries, laws protect religious freedom, which they guarantee as a basic human right.

Ideally, all countries would model their social contracts to protect religious pluralism, as the United States and India have done. Rather than repeating the saying that was popular when I was in college, asserting only "One Way" to God, I encourage you to remember there are "different ways to pray."

INSTITUTE:

From Page 9B

Much of the work they do is for local shops that sell "ready-made" clothes. Since the center is non-profit, the money made goes to buying more fabric and sewing machines and to pay the women a small stipend.

The money these women make creates new possibilities in life, for they no longer have to depend wholly on their husbands for income. They can buy new clothes for themselves or treat themselves to a meal; most importantly, perhaps, they are now contributing (in a way society readily understands) to their households.

The Shankernager community center provides a safe place where people of different backgrounds, with no other means of interaction, can work together and understand they are really not that different, no matter what politicians would have them believe. This net of safety and education a group of people created is a credit to the human spirit and the possibilities of peace and coexistence.

KERALA:

From Page 5B

After the British assumed control in 1795, Jews continued to live peacefully under British rule; their holy days and Sabbaths were acknowledged by the state.

Jew Town was once a thriving community; however, most of the Jewish families of Cochin moved to the new state of Israel after its founding in 1948. Although the Jewish congregation has subsequently been reduced and only a handful of Jewish people remain, their presence provides a poignant example of religious coexistence between Hindus and Jews.

Kerala's multi-layered international history has left additional cultural artifacts and religious traces throughout the state. Many Hindu temples of Kerala reflect ancient architectural wonders, occupying large areas where devotees move through courtyards-within-courtyards before reaching an inner sanctuary. Paintings and carvings depicting motifs from the Ramayana grace the walls and ceilings of these temples. Early Christian churches were built with distinct architectural features similar to ancient Hindu temples, although later churches were influenced by the Portuguese and recent ones by contemporary forms of architecture. In places of worship, Hindu and Christian iconographies often merge: at the coastal shrine to St. Thomas, the Mar Thoma, a statue of Jesus shows him rising from a lotus flower, a fitting symbol of Kerala's harmonic blending of religious traditions.

CITIZENSHIP:

From Page 3B

Perhaps this story can help me illustrate my relationship to religion in India as well. An open mind is important so that new things can be learned about other people. I am as much a foreigner to religion and religious life in India as I was a foreigner that day at the mosque. However, I left that mosque with a better understanding than I had when I arrived, and I am still no expert.

So, I urge you to remember as you read these articles that they represent an ongoing exploration and discovery, and that at this point it is very much my goal to ask questions more than I give answers.

Religion is always a difficult issue, not just because of the personal beliefs that everyone brings to the table, but also because it is a subjective experience that can never be adequately generalized.

My aim is to offer a window, into how cultures are used to perceive outsiders and their religious beliefs. I do not pretend to understand all aspects of the differing faiths I am interested in, nor am I interested in somehow deciding whether one is "better" than another.

On this note, I further urge you, the reader, to keep an open mind, suspending judgments of value if necessary, in the name of simply discovering how people on the opposite side of the globe make sense of themselves and of you.

Keep an eye out for the next McCaleb Initiative for Peace special edition to *The Chart* on April 16.

CENTER:

From Page 9B

This is an ongoing problem: many of these women's husbands are suspicious of the center, and some try to prevent their wives from going there. Traditional gender-role expectations are one of the main challenges this center faces, one which, ironically, has little to do with religious conflict.

For the most part, we were told, the husbands don't want their wives going to the center for the same reason they don't even want them to leave the house — jealous tendencies require control over the movements of their wives. Efforts are being made to pacify these men, including attempts at creating similar training programs for them. Already the HMI offers men classes in basic home appliance repair, and more classes are planned.

From the sewing and *henna* area, we moved on to the top floor of the building where there is a primary school. The center's school teaches kindergarten to third standard, which is essentially the same as third grade in the United States. There were approximately 100 pupils there, spread out in two small classrooms and one large room.

We arrived in the middle of one of their reading lessons, where the children were learning both Hindi and English.

The children were reading, as a group, sentences in English about basic things like foods and tastes. The children come from different religious backgrounds, but they are mostly Hindu and Muslim, reflecting the community population.

The students shyly smiled at us; as usual, a little humility on the outsider's part went a long way.

I sat down next to a few boys, but they were too shy to tell me what they were reading. By this time I had "break-the-ice" tactics that I had developed along the way. I asked one of the boys, "*Ap ka nam kya hei*?" which means "What is your name?"

They smiled and giggled, presumably because I had horribly mispronounced a few words, but nonetheless replied, "*Mira nam Prakash hei*."

In the end, I found out the name of the other boy and girl where I had sat down, and told them, "*Mira nam Mac hei*."

Just as I had come to expect, they repressed a few giggles when they heard my name. One of my favorite things about traveling abroad is the joy of having even your name seem so strange or silly to people you meet.

I think the three of us could have stayed in the classrooms all afternoon, but we became aware we had interrupted their lesson, and probably ought to let them get back to it. With handshakes and *namastes* for the teachers and waves for the children, we headed back downstairs.

Kumbier, Wells and I would not soon forget the warm reception and the unconditional acceptance we received that day from the children at the community center's school.

The HMI also offers a free health clinic at the center, open to all in the community. I realized later just how important this was.

Several weeks after this visit, while I was in Goa, I had the occasion to see the inside of a state-run hospital, luckily due to no injury of mine.

The conditions in the state-run hospital were deplorable, and I was all the more impressed with the clean facility, with preventative treatments open to all, offered by the HMI community development center.

The Community Development Program in the Sultan Shahi neighborhood is a wonderful credit to the vast understanding of religious reconciliation and value of inter-faith dialogue held by those at the HMI.

Its mission cannot focus only on conflict resolution but must also focus on conflict prevention.

The Sultan Shahi Community Development Center nurtures and cultivates productive means of inter-faith dialogue and interactions that lay a foundation of understanding.

The Center offers a safe place for diverse people to meet, beginning with children and continuing through adulthood.

FINDING PURITY

Mac Kenney/The Chart

A pool is used for washing feet before worship at a mosque in Madhya Pradesh. Symbolic meaning of rituals make up much of a Muslim's daily practices.

Philosophy spreads within countryside

Schools of thought arise through region's history, help to understand nation's religious belief system

BY MAC KENNEY
Chart Reporter

India's ancient society has given rise to a myriad of philosophies and schools of thought.

These many systems represent a shift in thought that took place in India around 600 B.C., when individual reasoning and questioning religious authority became acceptable. The catalysts for this change were Buddhism and Jainism. Both of these systems appealed to Hinduism's common people: laborers, artisans and merchants. Hinduism had to redefine its ideas and develop new ones in order to survive such changes and prevent further conversions to Buddhism and Jainism.

The branching of Hinduism can be represented as nine basic schools of thought. There are three heterodox schools, which opposed the classic Vedic texts: Buddhism, Jainism and Carvaka (a form of Hindu materialism). Both Buddhism and Jainism tend toward religious systems, and we have few primary works from Carvaka. The remaining six systems are the orthodox schools, which did not contest the ancient teachings of the Vedas, although some, such as Yoga, invented new means to the accepted ends. The title "Indian Philosophy" usually refers to the orthodox schools of thought.

While there are distinct differences among the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy, there are certain ideas that run through them all. Through these ideas we can gain a basic understanding of philosophy in India.

A common tenet of Indian philosophy is that all life, in its most basic form, is suffering. The physical, or empirical, world is temporary and less real than eternal reality or the transcendental world. The things of this empirical world, like envy and passion, are temporary and cause suffering. To avoid suffering, one must become detached from this illusionary empirical world. Through a cultivated detachment from these passions, suffering can be lessened and eliminated. Only eternal truth and ultimate bliss is left for the philosopher, and it is this attainment of eternal bliss that is the goal of the Indian philosophical life.

Indian philosophy can perhaps be generalized as a model of progress, or a path, to guide us through life. It assumes that the discovery of philosophy can have no objective substitute: it can only be reached subjectively. Indian philosophy is a model not an answer. It is a model because these eternal truths are not in fact discovered but attained, and the Indian philosophical discourse is meant to guide the reader toward this attainment. Indian philosophy is a way to live, with the intent of that life being an arrival at universal truth.

The willingness of these philosophers and men of faith, since some still affirmed the Vedas, to listen to the ideas of another, understand what they are saying, and then reaffirm their own beliefs is a wonderful lesson that everyone needs reminding of from time to time. Together with India's diverse religions, the many branches of Indian philosophy are the roots of coexistence in India, and these roots run deep.

Mac Kenney/ The Chart

Worshippers circle the Mother Goddess Shrine, chanting and playing drums to complete a ritual offering.

Religion dresses in several names

BY MAC KENNEY
Chart Reporter

The current appellation of the majority of Indians, "Hindu," is a word foreign to India and its people.

Tracing the etymology of this word brings us to the geography of India and the Indus River. The word "Hindu" began as a mispronunciation of the word "Sindu," which meant to define those living east of the Indus River.

Islamic invaders first used this term, but British colonialist put it into common usage. This happened, ironically, with the publication of a Hinduism handbook by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in 1877. The British began using the name specifically to define the religious practices dating back to the Aryan migration, and perhaps, inadvertently invented the reality of a unified Hinduism as well.

The practices and beliefs that are now considered "Hinduism" vary widely. Within the spectrum of Hinduism there is a plethora of deities and mythological figures, and the meanings of many of these differ across India. One of my favorite examples of this is the mythological figure Hanuman. In most parts of India, Hanuman, guardian of Kishkindha the monkey kingdom, is worshiped for his celibacy and devotion to God. Yet, there is a temple in southern India in which Hanuman is worshiped as a promoter of fertility, and women line up to embrace his statue to guarantee conception of a child. This large disparity in what "Hanuman" means suggests the many different beliefs and people that have come to be under a common title.

It becomes difficult, and perhaps an overreaction, to say that the ways of Hindu life are completely different. They have much in common because they have developed next to each other, and in some cases grown out of each other. Perhaps an analogy can be made between the many forms of Hinduism and the differences between denominations of Christianity. There are splits as subtle as those of Protestant denominations, and as striking as that of Catholicism and Protestantism. Where this analogy stops working, though, is when we talk about the common thread that binds these sects together. In Christianity, there is the Bible, but there is not an exact counterpart to that sacred text in Hinduism. The Vedic texts may come close, but there have been too many divergences from or adaptations of these texts to let them adequately represent the core of Hinduism. Instead, there are ideas that run through those beliefs grouped together as Hinduism. Ideas such as reincarnation, dharma (or cosmic order), and karma (energy that carries over through reincarnation) are found in nearly all forms of Hinduism.

Buddhism is a good example of a faith that in some ways is a part of Hinduism, but in others is very distinct from it. It began as a cult, under the guidance of a leader who wrote new texts, and is often viewed as a separate religion. However the Buddha is also considered one of the 10 incarnations of Lord Vishnu, an important deity in Hinduism. Even today some see Buddhism as a sect of Hinduism, though there also are many who see Buddhism as quite separate from Hinduism, such as Dalit leader Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and current Dalit political activists who have converted to Buddhism in protest of the caste system and Hinduism.

What does this all mean for religious coexistence? What is often thought of as one unified religion is itself a contemporary model of coexistence. During the 3,000-year history of religion in India, Hinduism itself is perhaps the firmest and deepest running root of coexistence.